

home design real estate

WINTER 2014/15

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a quarterly supplement of

**SEVEN DAYS**

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Cooking up a new kitchen

How to choose art  
for your home

Q&A with a home inspector

Office space overhauls

DIY project:  
Christmas-lights chandelier

Leah Brown, Priscilla FERNANDEZ, The Journal, 2000, pp. 109.  
Neph. Wagner, 2001, pp. 109. Anna Williams, 2001, pp. 109.  
John Williams, 2001, pp. 109. John Williams, 2001, pp. 109.  
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Winter 2014/15

## Find. Fix. Feather.

Those three words sum up the notions behind Seven Days: quarterly supplement about home, design and real estate. If you're in the market to buy, sell, make a major spruce up your decor we aim to inspire.

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### ON THE COVER

Wendy Johnson of Designs for Living designed this Weston kitchen. Built by Davis Frame Co. architects. Photo by Alec Marshall.

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- 8 oz. Cabot Extra Sharp Cheddar, grated
- 6 oz. Gruyere, grated
- 3 oz. Danish Blue Cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup Cotto Bread crumbs

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Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Add parts to boiling salted water and cook for 11 minutes. Meanwhile, heat milk over medium heat, but keep from boiling.

### Step 2

Melt 6 Tbs butter in a large pot, add flour and whisk over low heat for about 2 minutes. Add heated milk and continue whisking until thick and smooth. Remove from heat.

### Step 3

Add Cheddar, Gruyere, Blue Cheese and salt & pepper to taste. Stir in cooked pasta, rest well, and pour into a large baking dish. Top with bread crumbs and drizzle of remaining butter. Bake for 35-40 minutes until bubbly and browned.

Enjoy!

*\*Get cozy by adding some cooked Vermont beans and a dash of ketchup to the cheese mixture before baking.*

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on page 8

# What's Cooking?

*In the kitchen with  
designer Wendy Johnson*

BY KIAN CHIANG-WAREN



**TOP**  
A kitchen in a Clarendon home  
built in the early 1920s

**BOTTOM**  
A South Longbeach kitchen  
inspired by a 1950s style

"Today's kitchens are not just kitchens," says award-winning interior designer Wendy Johnson.

Te he sure, that room is still where meals are prepared. But increasingly, it's also the room where family members cross paths and visitors hang out. From a designer's standpoint, it's not uncommon to imagine the kitchen with a built-in reading nook, dining area and even recreation space. "The kitchen is just the center of everything that goes on," Johnson says



Johnson owns and operates Designs for Living, a kitchen, bath and "roomscape" design firm based in Manchester, VT. She's bulged clients artfully arrange their living spaces for more than 30 years. And she's racked up a string of industry honors, most recently the National Kitchen & Bath Association's 2013 Design Competition award for "best kitchen."

Johnson's aesthetic is eclectic and adaptable based on customer preference, though her portfolio reflects an affinity for rooms that are bathed in natural light, accented with contemporary touches of color and fitted with cabinets, countertops and fixtures in distinctive textures and finishes. She says she's inspired by classical design, nature and history.

That's a product of her professional and academic background, as well as personal preference. Johnson is a former biologist who took a break from science to raise her three children. When she restarted the workforce, she pursued her love of interior design by snagging a covered job at a high-end kitchen design showroom in Denver, Colo., while putting herself through design school. "We

maintained my love of nature and the environment," Johnson says, "but I just love interior design, and I'm passionate about kitchen design in particular."

When she works on a kitchen, Johnson likes to "incorporate wide-open spaces and also small, cozy spaces." The result should accommodate manifold functions: social prep, recreation and eating. "I try to think not just in terms of how it's going to work for somebody in the next few years but also over the long term," she says. Family dynamics and generational needs change over time, so designers can be mindful of accommodating growing kids, aging-in-place and other such shifts.

Johnson's golden rules for kitchen design? Bring in as much natural light as possible (a good rule of thumb for any room), and make sure there's plenty of counter space.

"A big trend we're seeing today, which I think is nice, is that people are looking at home more often than they used to," she says. "That went away for a couple of decades. But now people want to be home

## House hunting is just like any other shopping expedition.

If you identify exactly what you want and do some research, you'll zoom in on the home you want at the best price.

**These eight tips will guide you through a smart homebuying process.**

### 1. Know thyself.

Understand the type of home that suits your personality.

### 2. Research before you look.

List the features you most want in a home and identify which are necessities and which are extras. Shop online at Realtor.com to get a feel for the homes available in your price range in your favorite neighborhoods.

### 3. Get your finances in order.

Create a budget so you know how much you're comfortable spending each month on housing. Don't wait until you've found a home and made an offer to investigate financing.

### 4. Set a moving timeline.

Do you have bills that are on your credit that will take time to clear up? If you already own, have you sold your current home? If not, you'll need to factor in the time needed to sell.

### 5. Think longterm.

Your future plans may dictate the type of home you'll buy. Are you looking for a starter home with plans to move up in a few years, or do you hope to stay in the home for five to 10 years?

### 6. Work with a REALTOR®.

Ask people you trust for referrals to a real estate professional they trust. Check whether agents are Realtors®, which means they're members of the National Association of Realtors®. NAR has been a champion of homeownership rights for more than a century.

### 7. Be realistic.

It's OK to be picky about the home and neighborhood you want, but don't be close minded, unrealistic, or blinded by minor imperfections.

### 8. Limit the opinions you solicit.

It's natural to seek reassurance when making a big financial decision. If you need a second opinion, select one or two people.



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## What's Cooking? 401

ment, spending time with family and cooking together."

To bring "sunlight and beauty and spaciousness and comfort" into her kitchen, Johnson likes to tackle them from multiple angles. She typically draws up several different concepts with her clients at the very beginning. "It's much, much easier to work out your own ideas on paper rather than, years later, wonder why we didn't consider something," she says with a laugh.

Sometimes an unusual approach — such as creating a new window or bumping a space into an adjoining room to accommodate the refrigerator, for example — makes all the difference.

Those who'd like a kitchen upgrade but can't invest in an interior designer need not be discouraged. Baring up your own kitchen, Johnson says, "does not have to be a horrendous expense."

One inexpensive and easy kitchen

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WENDY JOHNSON

update is to paint the cabinets. "It's amazing the difference it makes," she says. (The cost will likely be less than \$100.) The hardest part is scraping off the paint that's already there.) Changing the hardware on cabinets and drawers, Johnson adds, can also freshen the look of your kitchen.

Rejoicing the countertop is another instant, albeit more costly, way to update a look, and doing so can expand the workspace. Stonecore counters are aesthetically pleasing and functional, Johnson suggests. And adding more counters can present other options, such as installing a new sink or under the counter storage.

The highest impact fix, she says, is great lighting. In addition to letting in as much natural light as possible, Johnson advises adding or changing indoor lights. "I jokingly tell my clients that we could have a kitchen with chicken cages for cabinets if only the lighting is fabulous," she says. "Lighting is huge." ☀

**Designs for Living**  
308-1990 [designsforliving.com](http://designsforliving.com)

**TIP** A Vermont home with an eat-in kitchen and expanded food prep area

**BEFORE** A South Londoner's kitchen activities are more relaxed

## Fixtures With Flair

Looking for lights, faucets and all the other kitchen fixings? These Vermont-based businesses dish out unusual — and beautiful — decor.



### Faircetto

Faircetto.com

Give your kitchen sink a punk-rock makeover with solid bronze shell faucets designed by Frank DeAngelis of class to Home in South Burlington. The fixtures come in a range of finishes and are also available as door knobs. If skulls are not your thing, hold on: DeAngelis is currently at work on a Buddha head prototype.



### Conant Metal & Light

[conantmetallight.com](http://conantmetallight.com)

The artists at this Pitts, Direct shop churn out an eye-popping array of original lighting options, not to mention tables and other furniture items in vintage metals. For kitchens, owner Steve Conant recommends hanging pendant lights over counters to ensure a well-lit work space. Many fixtures made at Conant are unique works of art created from recycled repurposed materials, including metals, wooden pins and former factory tools.



### Anomali

[anomali.co](http://anomali.co)

The Montpelier design and fabrication company is making a reputation for its artisanal concrete counters. Designers Chris Kaper and Doreen Taylor have made them for restaurants including Positive Pie and Kismet, as well as for private residences. Concrete has a durable surface and can be cast into virtually any shape. "We like it because of its versatility," says Kaper. "It doesn't use take-away from concrete. It's that you can take this homemade-looking product and use it with very few restrictions in terms of form, shape and appearance. It's really just up to your imagination on how you cast the form."

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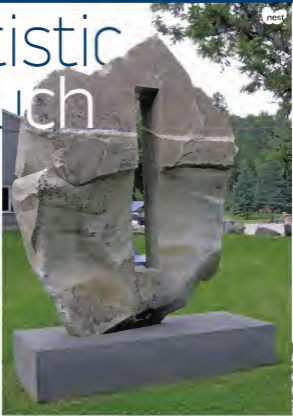


**FDIC**

# Artistic Touch

*Vermont galleries add artful accents to homes and businesses*

BY AMY LILLY



"Solace" by Chris Daniels, outside of Stone Family Practice

When Lillian and Bill Mauer, co-owners of the building that houses Stowe Family Practice, decided they wanted to buy an outdoor sculpture for the property, they went a mile down Mountain Road to West Branch Gallery & Sculpture Park. Owned by Turi Swenson and her sculptor husband Chris Curtis, West Branch is one of the few places in Vermont that offers a wide selection of contemporary outdoor sculpture for sale.

Though the Mauers are longtime art collectors, Swenson recalls that they selected a piece she immediately knew was wrong for the site of a medical clinic. The sculpture was a segmented metal creature that rose from the ground in an S-curve, evoking a drooping human figure. After Swenson directed them to other sculptures, the Mauers chose a stone piece by Curtis called "Balance."

This 8-foot-tall, roughly round sculpture has a rectangular cutout in the middle. It's the kind of Zen piece that, the West Branch owners say, reassures patients coming in for checkups, even if they don't consciously notice it.

Art makes its way into homes and businesses through several channels. Owners may search for art themselves, hire an interior designer or go straight to a gallery for help. A gallery's eye is key, says Swenson. Those art consultants are people who "live" the work they represent and can judge closely what will suit a space best. As an added bonus, their services don't obligate clients to buy, and cost nothing beyond the artwork's price tag.

Not talked with two art galleries that offer art consultation services: West Branch and Burlington City Arts. However, any gallery owner who represents a significant array of artists will happily visit a space and make suggestions. "It's the unspoken

thing we do," says Jane Pordgett, of Pordgett Scientific Gallery in Shelburne.

Swenson has a listed businesses and private residences from Grand Isle to San Francisco with art. She and Curtis purchased a trailer so they can haul multiple works to clients. Once there, Curtis typically holds a painting in place while Swenson and the client confer.

For those interested in sculpture, Curtis creates full-scale mock-ups of any piece in West Branch's extensive outdoor collection and brings it to the proposed site. This allows the client to see the piece in its environment and easily move it around while deciding on placement. Curtis' plywood model of "Balance," for example, helped the Mauers decide to place the sculpture at the clinic's entrance, rather than at the roadside location they originally envisioned. The gallery takes care of final installation.

Increasingly, though, Swenson's clients choose to assess their options digitally, by sending her an iPhone photo of their space. "That's the beginning of the fun," she says. Using a measurement provided by the client — the dimensions of the room, or even the length of a chair leg — she can estimate the size of the artwork,

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## DIGITAL DESIGN

A part of her art consultancy services, Tara Swenson's Tar & Ben uses Photoshop to show painting options for a Vermont couple's lake home.

## LEFT TO RIGHT

"Through Life Like the Wind" by Swenson (the chosen work)  
 "Playground" by James Patrick Johnson  
 "Ponding Order" by Chris Griffin

## Artistic Touch

and Photoshop in any number of options. She even adds shadows.

BCA's corporate art program has its own digital service: an enormous library of images, most of them works by Vermont artists. This comprehensive database is also used for its art-leasing program. Kate Ashman, the leasing specialist, and Keri Macos, director of art sales and gallery administration, look through the database with clients.

BCA's involvement with one Burlington business, Hotel Vermont, yielded particularly stunning results. Macos's predecessor, Sara Katz (now BCA's assistant director), was the art consultant when the hotel was under construction two years ago. Hotel owner Jay Canning's interior designers, Kim Doerflinger and her crew at Burlington's TriestCollins, brought her onto the job.

The interior designers wanted abstract art and presented BCA with a carefully considered selection of materials. Of the three swirling, dark magenta, Gail Salzman paintings, Katz chose for the hotel's

lobby, she comments, "We thought the colors made sense for this place. And Salzman does a lot with water. Given the proximity to Lake Champlain, we thought it was appropriate."

The BCA staff also suggested the Nana Kapigella pen-and-ink-on-paper bird scene in one of the hallway, and digital prints of it for each of the queen bed rooms. They commissioned Torrey and Jesse Volney of Winslow's New Dads to silkscreen a black-ink-on-white branch-and-bird design on the wall beside each king bed.

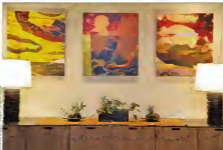
Owner Canning, an art lover himself, chose to place a Duncan Johnson found-materials wood sculpture over the main desk. The work is striking in its isolation.

Not every client can determine the right piece and placement, of course. Gallery folks like those at BCA and West Branch work with all types, including corporate businesses that have a branded look and homeowners who have no familiarity with art.

The results are powerful. "Spaces with art create a strong 'first impression,'" says Swenson. "When you walk in, you may not even know why you like this place!" 🐾

WHEN YOU WALK IN, YOU  
 MAY NOT EVEN KNOW WHY  
 YOU LIKE THIS PLACE.

TARA SWENSON



## Burlington City Arts

Kate Macos  
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## West Branch Gallery

Tara Swenson  
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Gail Salzman paintings in  
 Hotel Vermont's lobby

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# Belrose's Place

*Home inspector Jeff Belrose digs deep so buyers don't have to*

BY KEN PICARD

Home inspector Jeff Belrose straddles the line between being thorough and being nitpicky. During an inspection, he looks closely at everything, but doesn't blow every flaw and blemish out of proportion.

"You're like a referee, calling it as you see it," he says. "If there are two parties involved, one person is going to like the call, and the other person may not."

Belrose launched Belrose Home Inspections in 2009 after years of restoring homes and businesses damaged by mold, water or fires. Currently, he inspects 600 to 850 homes annually. Previously, Belrose, 47, worked in education and mental health services in St. Albans.

Having a mental health background still informs his work. It is not unusual, he says, for a buyer or homeowner to respond to a discovery of mold, termites or foundation problems the same way as someone on a mental health crisis. In those circumstances, Belrose says he tries to help people put the discoveries into perspective. As he puts it, "Unless it's really out of control, I look at everything as fixable."

Belrose took time out between jobs to speak with Mast.

**NEST: What are the most common problems you encounter?**

**JEFF BELROSE:** Everything from not being the right smoke detector on place to basic plumbing leaks. Problems with roofs are tough because, unless it's raining, you're not necessarily going to see it if it's leaking. I had the good fortune this summer of inspecting a home during a heavy rainstorm, and I could literally see water dripping through the roof!

**What are the most severe problems you've identified?**

Foundations are some of the costliest. One day we looked at a bank-owned property, full of mold, and the buyer was planning to flip the house. We spread up some of the walls, which you generally don't get to do on a normal inspection. It turned out, all the concrete had to be replaced — a \$30,000 repair. On septic systems, I've advised clients to [misquote] what's underground in an older field and, since enough, the field had failed. That's a \$20,000 to \$25,000 fix. I had three of these last year.

**What complaints do you hear from clients?**

A lot of clients have this misconception that, because they get a home inspection, their house should be proclaimed new and free of issues. Then, a month later, their hot water tank fails. There's no way I would know that. If I could know that in advance, we'd all be rich. But they always start their email with, "I want to know why that was missed." I never wake up in the morning and think, "I think I'll miss this Smith's defect on her water tank today."

**Any unusual situations you've encountered?**

I've found five wild animals in homes (bats living in basements and raccoons living in attics). I've literally seen streams running through basements, and they're always been that way. I'm also fascinated by the way people build things, good and bad.

**What's an example of the good?**

One guy wrote about the house's entire interior in a crave-life fashion. He also built the main part of his house using tree trunks as the supports. It was amazing.

**And the bad?**

I've inspected homes that you wonder how anyone lives in them. But one of the things you can't do is judge a fellow human being for the choices they make — much like in my mental health days. People are people.

**Is your job ever hazardous?**

It can be. Some people do some creative things with wiring, and you're unlucky sometimes. A couple of weeks ago, I flipped a breaker and it fished, inside a lead bag right in front of my face, and shot the whole house down. Strictly safety, I've seen decks built improperly that won't hold weight very well. Sometimes, I advise my clients to give a little too far.

**Ever get bitten by dogs?**

A couple of times a year. I love dogs and I respect their place, but I don't believe anybody when they say "Oh, Fluffy's OK. He won't bite." He will. One time I had this little dog bite me three times. He just kept coming onto me and biting me on the ankles.

**What's the best part of your job?**

The people. I have great customers: the first-time home buyers who are super-excited about buying their first home, the second-time buyers, the people buying their last house who are looking to downsize. I really enjoy the personal contact.

**Any advice for homebuyers?**

People should really consider a pre-inspection if they're selling a home. It takes a lot of uncertainty out of the negotiation because there aren't any surprises. You either know about the issues upfront or you've already addressed them, so you don't feel blindsided. Just make sure you're using someone who has the proper credentials, and not "Uncle Billy." We love Uncle Billy, and he's welcome to come along, but you've got to treat this like any other professional service. ♥

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# Making It Work

*Red Thread designs office spaces for a new era*

BY ETHAN DE BEVO

The more time you spend in the Burlington office of design company Red Thread, the likelier you are to notice the subtle, ambient hiss from ceiling-mounted speakers. Due to its wavelength, this sound is classified as pink noise, and its use is to render intra-office conversations distinguishable. You can tell a conversation is taking place on the other side of the room, but you can't make out the words.



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## Making It Work

Whether pink, white or any other some color, the method works. When *Near* visits Red Thread at its Battery Street quarters, corporate account manager Owen Milne, who a colleague to turn off the sound for a moment. What was previously an indistinct conversation instantly becomes intelligible conversation. For a bustling workplace, the advantages of such a system are obvious.

That Red Thread employs pink noise in its own office indicates that the company's designers practice what they preach. Every shared work space hosts a small touchscreen flats used to make room reservations. Comfortably contemporary couches for lounging are within arm's reach of a full-function digital workstation. A small, glassed-in room not only offers quiet to anyone who requires intense focus, but makes plain that whoever's inside it wishes not to be disturbed.

Milne — no relation to the recent Vermont gubernatorial candidate — says that a well-designed work space is only as good as the understanding of the "processes" for the use of that space. "You can solve a whole lot of real estate issues by looking at how much time people spend in certain places and how much real estate you allocate to it," he suggests.

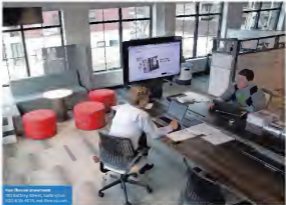
Red Thread, a full-service design agency, is a semi-independent boutique imprint of Steelcase, the world's largest manufacturer of office furniture. The design is for every work-life process in an institution: from office layout to software environments to furniture (many brands, not just Steelcase). The idea is to offer clients a one-stop, customizable, fully integrated design experience.

"What we do," says Milne, "is essentially build a 3D model of an empty space. We've got thousands of different line items — for connector brackets and cables and so on — and the designer is critical to see that all of these pieces come into a system."

Steelcase as an international brand, but Red Thread's 30 offices and four warehouses, including one in Wilton, are all in located in New England. The Burlington office has worked with a diverse array of local clients, including South Burlington's engineering supply company Lowmoor, the regional nonprofit mental health agency Howard Center, and municipal organizations such as the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

Milne exemplifies the company's integrative approach when he visits the Seven Days/Near office to give an informal consultation on the theoretical redesign of an awkward conference room. While he's interested in such nuts-and-bolts issues as the placement of the video projector, most of the questions he asks concern the nature of the meetings that take place there and whether employees use their laptops during those meetings.

For many clients, Milne says, Red Thread plays a "sheep role," guiding the client through the wilderness of office-furniture options and acting in liaison between client and architect. The client benefits of having a single design company to do everything from workstations to ethernet cables, he says, is that Red Thread is able to anticipate questions that would not arise if a job were to be tackled by multiple, disconnected firms.



Red Thread's headquarters, 100 Battery Street, Burlington, Vt. 05401-3033, red-thread.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Open-plan office; modular conference space; time-to-bookend flat-screen monitors; a 3D furniture visualization workstation for a client

"If you have a bank of windows here and a video camera here," says Milne, gesturing around a Red Thread meeting room, "everyone's face is going to look dark during a videoconference. We provide that kind of insight."

Part of the company's mission is, in his pett, "to deconstruct all of the assumptions that [we] hold about the workplace." He rattles off examples: Why do we assume that employees aren't working when they're not physically in the office? Why do executives "need" or "deserve" large offices, when most of their time is spent off-site or in meeting rooms? In an era when many employees carry powerful computers in their pockets, how issues of space and privacy in the workplace changed in a fundamental way?

"People assume that having a high-performance work environment is really expensive," says Milne, but many companies don't realize that a rearrangement of existing space — rather than the construction of additional space — often ends up, even after redesign costs, saving the company money in the long run.

As Milne puts it, "The workplace needs to support not just what you do — that's easy to design around — but why you exist." ■



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*How to make a chandelier  
with Christmas lights*

BY LAROLYN FOX

# Twinkle Time

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There's nothing more festive during the holiday season than basking in the glow of twinkle lights — whether they're decking your tree or the eaves of your house. So why pack those sparkling strings away after just a couple of weeks? For all the sweat — and swearing, if my experience is typical — you put into untangling them, the lights deserve a longer display. Year-round, even.

As someone who travels for the holidays and doesn't get a Christmas tree, I wanted to find a more combinatorial way to bring the cheery lights into my apartment beyond the holiday season. While simply stringing them up along the ceiling is always an option, I was looking to create a more elegant light source. A friend's wedding nor summer wedding sprang to mind. The groom had tied together fallen branches and wrapped them in lights, creating a gorgeously rustic chandelier that was mounted over the dance floor. It was a showstopper.

I was sure that if I created that chandelier without any kind of instruction, I'd eventually be held responsible when a branch slipped out of my shoddy knots and landed someone on the head — causing concussion, brain damage and, probably death. So I took to Pinterest to find standard DIY chandeliers.

There was some weird stuff. At least three sites suggested I affix icicle lights to a Hula Hoop and hang it above my dining room table. I'd give them points for creativity — but it still looked like a Hula Hoop. No amount of lights could disguise that.

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## Twinkle Time

I started on something a little less circus-y. A craft blog called *All Things Heart & Home* gave simple instructions for crafting an outdoor chandelier, in which tiny white lights were threaded through globs of epoxy grapevine and hung from a birch branch. It looked wondrous and magical. I adapted the idea for indoor use with pretty good success, if I do

say so myself. (See my step-by-step directions below.) Supplies cost about \$60—not bad for a chandelier!

The best part, at least for other

tree-challenged folks like myself? This project doesn't require a chainsaw, a power drill, a lock washer or even a wrench. If you can tie a double knot, you can make this a Christmas miracle, indeed. 🌟

**IF YOU CAN TIE A DOUBLE KNOT, YOU CAN MAKE THIS. A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE, INDEED.**

### MATERIALS

- (available at most craft stores)
- 100-count string of white lights (with brown wires, if possible)
- a large grapevine bulb
- a small grapevine bulb
- garden twine
- sturdy birch branch (roughly 1 foot long)
- two-eye bolts
- extension cord

### DIRECTIONS

**Begin by arranging the grapevine wire in the order you'd like them to hang:** outermost large and inner spheres.

**Carefully thread the lights through each sphere.** Use short lengths of garden twine to double-knot the wire to the grapevine every so often. (This helps keep the lights in a globe-like shape.) It's okay to be messy, and the most time-consuming part of the project. Be honest: if you have the lights plugged in as you work, it will help you visualize what you want the bulb to look like. Try not to let the bulb come out through the grapevine. Make sure to keep the plug accessible.

**Secure the birch branch horizontally across the ends of these chairs.** Use various lengths of twine to tie the spheres to the branch as desired. I left some spheres hanging lower than others. Some tie the eye bolts into the string where needed. Use twine to hang the branch from the hooks. Plug in the extension cord and run it down to the nearest power outlet. Use an extension cord as needed. Let it glow!



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